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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Says Ukraine War Winding Down, Blasts West for Backing Kyiv

By AFP

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President Vladimir Putin in the stands at the Victory Day parade. **Kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said the war in Ukraine was winding down, slamming Western support for Kyiv, as the first day of a U.S.-brokered ceasefire was marked by mutual accusations of violations.

Putin spoke after telling soldiers at the scaled-down Victory Day parade in Moscow that they were fighting an "aggressive force" in Ukraine, backed by all of NATO and describing his war goals as "just."

The Russian leader has made the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II a central narrative of his 25-year rule and repeatedly invoked it to justify his Ukraine offensive.

Russian authorities typically mark the Victory Day parade with pomp and grandeur. But a

spate of Ukrainian long-range attacks in recent weeks prompted the Kremlin to ramp up security measures and downsize this year's celebrations.

When asked after the parade whether the Western military aid to Ukraine had gone too far, Putin said: "They started ratcheting up the confrontation with Russia, which continues to this day.

"I think it [the conflict] is heading to an end but it's still a serious matter."

"They spent months waiting for Russia to suffer a crushing defeat, for its statehood to collapse. It didn't work out.

"And then they got stuck in that groove and now they can't get out of it," Putin said, referring to the Western countries.

Embed:

> ⊠ Russia's Victory Day parade on Red Square is underway. The event will not feature military hardware for the first time since 2008.
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Putin added he was ready to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a third country only once all conditions for a potential peace agreement were settled.

"This should be the final point, not the negotiations themselves," he said.

Ceasefire violations

After two failed attempts at truces this week by both Russia and Ukraine, U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday announced that a three-day ceasefire between both sides would come into effect from Saturday.

Moscow and Kyiv traded accusations of violations, but no major strikes were reported, despite continued drone activity and civilian casualties on both sides.

"Hopefully, it is the beginning of the end of a very long, deadly, and hard fought War," Trump posted on his Truth Social network, adding the ceasefire would be accompanied by a prisoner exchange.

The Kremlin said that as of now there were no plans to prolong the truce.

The warring sides also agreed to swap 1,000 prisoners each during the truce. But Putin said Saturday that Russia had not yet received any proposals from Ukraine on the exchange.

Scaled-down parade

The parade was vastly smaller compared to previous years, with no military hardware on display for the first time in nearly two decades and only a handful of foreign dignitaries in attendance — most of them leaders of Russia's close allies.

In an address to the parade, attended by Russian military units as well as soldiers from North Korea, Putin invoked the Soviet victory to rally support for his army in Ukraine.

"The great feat of the generation of victors inspires the soldiers carrying out the goals of the special military operation today," Putin said.

"They are confronting an aggressive force armed and supported by the entire NATO bloc. And despite this, our heroes move forward," he said.

"I firmly believe that our cause is just," he added later.

The speech drew a cool reception from some in Moscow, with internet outages and fatigue over the four-year war casting a shadow over the events.

When asked how she felt on Victory Day, which marks the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, 36-year-old economist Elena replied: "Nothing."

"I need the internet, and I don't have it," she told AFP from central Moscow, saying she would not watch the parade.

Russia has introduced intermittent internet shutdowns for the duration of the parade, citing increased threats from Ukrainian attacks.

Only the leaders of Belarus, Malaysia, Laos, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were listed as attending, in contrast to high-profile visitors including China's Xi Jinping during last year's event.

Now in its fifth year, the war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and spiraled into Europe's deadliest since World War II.

U.S.-mediated talks on ending the fighting have shown little progress since February, when Washington shifted focus to its war against Iran.

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